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The Great Lamentation:

A

S E R M O N

IN COMMEMORATION OF

D A N I E L W E B S T E R ,

DELIVERED IN CAMBRIDGE,

ON SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 21, 1852.

BY REV. WILLIAM A. STEARNS.

Noster hic dolor, nostrum vulnus.

SECOND EDITION.

BOSTON AND CAMBRIDGE:
JAMES MUNROE AND COMPANY.
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Cambridgeport, Nov. 22, 1852.

REV. WILLIAM A. STEARNS,

Dear Sir,—The undersigned, having been appointed a Committee for that purpose, respectfully solicit your compliance with the desire, very generally expressed by the Congregation, that you will furnish for publication a copy of the Discourse, delivered yesterday morning, on the Life and Character of Daniel Webster.

Very respectfully,

WILLIAM FISK,
T. B. BIGELOW,
AMBROSE CHAMBERLAIN,
AARON RICE,
JAMES ATWOOD.

“ Magno in populo cum sæpe coorta est
Seditio, sævitque animis ignobile vulgus ;
Tum, pietate gravem ac meritis si forte virum quem
Conspexere, silent, arrectisque auribus adstant.
Ille regit dietis animos, et pectora mulcet.”

“ Lucem redde tuæ, Dux Boŕe, patriæ ;
Instar veris enim, vultus ubi tuus
Affulsit populo, gratior it dies,
Et soles melius nitent.”

“ Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth
alone ; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.”

S E R M O N .

GENESIS 50: 10.

— AND THERE THEY MOURNED WITH A GREAT AND VERY SORE
LAMENTATION.

THE patriarch was dead. Joseph and his brethren and his father's house, the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of the court and of the country, chariots and horsemen, in all a very great company, went up from Egypt to Canaan to bury Jacob. And when they came to the threshing-floor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan, the funeral procession paused, and gave itself up to mourning, insomuch that the inhabitants of the land said, "This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians."

A more than patriarchal mourning has just been witnessed among us. For depth of sorrow, for the numbers afflicted, for simplicity in the mode of expressing grief, the scenes at the floor of Atad give precedence to the recent scenes at Marshfield. There lay the great statesman of America, beneath the trees before his mansion door, in the silent majesty of death. That eye, which sometimes seemed as lightning from a thunder-cloud, was shut; those lips, for whose accents millions have listened entranced, were stiff and motionless. The glow

had passed from his cheek ; the heart, whose throbbing was felt by nations, had become as a rock ; and death reigned over the mortal man. No pageantry attended the obsequies. No cannon, nor muffled drum, nor tolling bells, nor ranks of soldiery, nor bands of music, nor ostentatious tears announced that one of the greatest of the earth had fallen. But there gathered around that reverend form thousands and thousands of afflicted hearts. All the morning they were coming in. Massachusetts was there, New England was there, the country was there. The hills around were blackened with multitudes coming in on foot—the roads were filled and the valleys crowded with vehicles bringing mourners from near and from afar. Around the remains of the great man, in and about his dwelling, down the avenues, and over his grounds, thronged the crowd. Silence reigned ; sorrow was on every countenance ; the nation's heart stood still. Nature sympathized. The great tree, through whose thick summer foliage the departed was accustomed to gaze into the heavens and worship, drooped with its mighty naked branches to the ground. Two weeping elms, which the statesman had planted and named for his dead children, Edward and Julia, stood up like statues in tears. The forests and shrubbery, smitten with autumnal frosts, had put on their mourning garments, and the sere leaves were dropping on every side. Flocks of birds seemed to beat the air with heavy wing, as in sympathy with the occasion they passed over the place. The funeral services were distinguished for simplicity and solemnity. Two

coal-black chargers drew the hearse, while the farmers in the neighborhood, with eyes full of tears, carried the pall. They left great Webster in the new tomb which he had recently prepared for his last resting-place, and went silently away. Was there no mourning but in Marshfield? Was there a city, a town, a log cottage, a boat on our waters,—was there a true American heart anywhere, which did not bleed with its own and its country's grief?

When a great man dies the people are called upon to pause and reflect. When his life has been interwoven with the history of his country; when, manifesting singular abilities, he has performed singular services; when the existing height of national elevation could never, to human appearance, have been attained without him; when at length he is summoned away from his earthly scene of action, it becomes his bereaved fellow-countrymen to review his life, contemplate his character, and render thanks to God for his powers and good deeds.

DANIEL WEBSTER was born on the 18th of January, 1782, and was seventy years old when he died. His lineage was of the hardy yeomanry of New-Hampshire. Nurtured in the healthful toils of an almost frontier farmer,—in addition to the opportunities of a country school kept but a few weeks in the year,—he was educated with Bible and Catechism, by the counsels and spirit of a religious home. When about fifteen years of age, he began to prepare for college. After a few months' study in Exeter Academy, and a few months'

more in the family of Rev. Mr. Wood, of Boscawen, he entered Dartmouth. Having completed his course with respectability, though his term of study was somewhat interrupted by the necessity of school-keeping to defray expenses, and having given many indications of splendid powers, he took the regular degree of Bachelor of Arts in his twentieth year. He united with the church of Christ at an early age, and at one time thought of entering the ministry, but on the whole decided for the law. Having acquired the rudiments of his profession, by hard, though somewhat broken study, in 1804 he entered the office of Christopher Gore, in Boston. He began to practise law in Boscawen in 1805. He removed to Portsmouth in 1807, where he remained an ornament of the bar nine years. While at Portsmouth, he was elected to Congress in 1812, and re-elected in 1814. Here he laid the foundations of his fame. In 1816, he removed to Boston. In 1818, he argued the Dartmouth College case, which placed him in the first rank of his profession. In 1820, he was chosen a member of the Convention in Massachusetts for revising our State Constitution. The published minutes of that assembly do him honor. The same year, Dec. 22d, he delivered his address at Plymouth, on occasion of the second centennial from the first landing of our fathers. That masterpiece of wisdom and eloquence, what school-boy cannot repeat many of its brilliant passages? Need I rehearse the story of his life and achievements farther? The oration at the laying of the corner-stone of Bunker Hill Monument; the eulogy on Adams and Jefferson; the

great speech of 1830, on what was called Foot's resolution; the speeches which followed, and, in 1832, overwhelmed the doctrine of nullification; his services when Secretary of State during President Tyler's administration—in reference to the northeastern boundary question; in suppressing the slave trade on the coast of Africa; surmounting national difficulties of long standing; opening important commercial relations with China; securing the recognition of the independence of the Sandwich Islands; his agency during Mr. Polk's administration in settling the Oregon question; his almost superhuman efforts to preserve the integrity of the Union after the death of President Taylor and during the agitations of the last few years; together with recent achievements as a second time Secretary of State—all these are familiar to every intelligent citizen. His closing days, the strong man bowing himself beneath the blow of supposed ingratitude and the power of disease, his parting counsels, his sublime death,—who needs information on these topics when the newspapers are echoing and re-echoing them through the land, and the providence of God is impressing them on the memory in lines too deep ever to be erased?

Let us look at some of the elements of that greatness which we are now contemplating.

Mr. Webster was remarkable for penetration and comprehension, for analysis, clear arrangement and statement. He would fix his large powers on a subject as he fixed his large burning eyes upon an object. He

would look into a subject, look through it, look around it, master it. He would see it in its consequences; and foretell the results of measures, and the future movements of society with an almost more than mortal prescience. His comprehensiveness was as singular as his penetration. There are many who have ability to grasp the whole of a small subject, or some entire fragment of a great subject, but they cannot see the small subject in its great relations, nor the great subject in its remote conclusions. Like men in a thick fog, they see distinctly that which is just around them, but all is darkness beyond the narrow horizon of their vision. Hence, while they speak honestly, and their reasonings seem specious in certain limited directions, they constantly stumble where the consequences of actions are felt over a wide circle, and extend into coming years. Thus, some politicians can counsel well for a town, or even for a state, supposing it to stand alone, who utterly fail when they seek the best interests of a nation. Mr. Webster had the power of seeing over a vast expanse, and in all directions, and far down the future, and forming conclusions in view of numerous circumstances, clashing interests, and complicated relations.

What he saw himself, he could communicate to others. He would take the entangled skein in pieces, and lay the threads in order. He would analyze a subject, separating part from part, till every member and fragment stood by itself; and then he would put the separate parts together in such simple arrangement that the most moderate understanding could see them in their con-

nections. What he saw clearly, he could express plainly.

Many great thinkers are too deep for common apprehension. They think themselves into the thickets, but do not think themselves out of the woods again. They get only far enough to understand the matter obscurely themselves, and so express themselves obscurely to others. And some minds suppose thoughts obscurely expressed to be great thoughts, and their authors great men; simply because they themselves cannot understand them. Mr. Webster always thought himself through. His views became transparent to himself, and then, in that plain English of which he was such a master, he would make them transparent to others. To make a difficult subject so plain that even a humble capacity shall see no difficulty in it, this is one of the highest triumphs of intellect.

I think I have indicated the prominent element of Mr. Webster's mind. Its greatness did not consist in what superficial men call genius—brilliant flights, bursts of splendor shot forth at will, great accomplishments without great efforts—though his imagination was powerful, and on an emergency he was never unprepared.—but it consisted in a power of fixed attention and concentration combined with sound judgment applied to a subject, till he saw through, and all over it, and could bring it forth into luminous perception.

Of course, he was a severe student. From boyhood to old age, he applied himself to books, to observation, to reflection. His mind was disciplined by classical

studies. The influence of the Grecian and Roman models is manifest in almost all his productions. The appropriateness of his classical allusions and citations has often been remarked. His recent address before the New-York Historical Society shows how greatly he was indebted to the severe training of a thorough collegiate course. A single quotation in that address, taken from Sallust and applied to the exiled Hungarian then filling the land with his touching plaints, has brought tears, I doubt not, to the eyes of a thousand scholars. I cannot dwell on this point. Mr. Webster must have been a great man, under almost any circumstances; but he never could have gone down to posterity as the compeer of Demosthenes, had he been ignorant of the Grecian and the Roman masters. His intellect was also disciplined by the tough theorems of jurisprudence, by the severe conflicts of the bar, and the habit of accurate investigation which the practice of law requires; while, at the same time, his mind was enriched by a vast amount of general reading. God made him capable of becoming great; Mr. Webster made himself what God designed him to be.

You must add to his intellectual qualities a quality of heart. Mere intellect is hardly fitted for popular impression. He was a man of strong passions, colossal in emotion as well as understanding. Feeling impelled him to action. What he loved, he loved with all the strength of his great heart. He loved with a childish tenderness. You see his nature when a boy of fifteen. His father then informed him of his intention to give

him an education. "I remember," says Mr. Webster, "the very hill which we were ascending, through deep snows, in a New-England sleigh, when my father made known this purpose to me. I could not speak. How could he, I thought, with so large a family, and in such narrow circumstances, think of incurring so great an expense for me. A warm glow ran all over me. I laid my head on my father's shoulder and wept."* His nature is seen in the gigantic emotions with which he struggled when called to part with his children; in the love which he often expressed for surviving kindred; in the affections of his dying hours; in his keen sensibility to the ingratitude of his fellow-men. With these intense feelings did he love his country; next to his Creator, I know not that he loved anything so well. This free country, the Union, the Constitution, were regarded by him with a veneration and affection approaching worship. Love of country was an element of his greatness. I speak of it here only in this respect. It is greatness itself. It brings out greatness. Setting great motives before the mind, it stimulates to great actions. To Mr. Webster, it was an inspiration. It glowed in his soul, gave eloquence to his speech, and made toil in the service of patriotism a pleasure.

Let us now look at some of the products of that wonderful mind. Of the published works of Mr. Webster, we have several large volumes. He has not, like Cicero, written numerous treatises in retirement. But, like Demosthenes, nearly all his productions are the result of

* Biographical memoir, by Edward Everett.

his interest in great legal questions and public affairs. Looking at these works merely as the fruits of the human mind, as we would look at the works of Homer, or Shakspeare, or Lord Bacon,—and so, as of value to other countries and to all ages,—there is nothing in the English language which surpasses them. They are models of their kind for all time. Strength of intellect, concentration of thought, propriety of arrangement, perspicuity and power of expression, and a certain nobleness of sentiment characterize them. His appeals are addressed, not usually to the passions of men, but, like the Grecian orator, to their honor, their sense of justice, their regard for right and truth and the interests of the country. He seems to breathe, when he speaks, in the pure, bracing mountain air of duty. There is sublimity and majesty in his mental movements, and an elevated, healthful spirit in almost every paragraph.

The impression made on the mind by different writers is various. Some interest, but excite no reflection; some infuse discontent; some deaden, rather than quicken the moral sensibilities; and some drag the mind downward, instead of inspiring right emotion. An author's spirit seems to linger about his words and impart itself to them who read. The writings of Mr. Webster are always elevating, always invigorating. We seem conscious of intellectual expansion in studying them. They exalt the mind, and stimulate to great efforts and patriotic deeds. Towering and sublime, they stand before us like the monument at whose base their author more than once addressed the world.

Viewed in this light, let us thank God for such a mind and such fruits. Worthy to be studied by all nations, and in all ages, they are especially adapted to the education of American youth. Thousands of school-boys know many passages of them by heart, and tens of thousands, in future days, will repeat these words of power. They will be studied as models of parliamentary address, juridical demonstration, and fervid oratory. They will have an almost unbounded influence on coming times.

And I thank God that the youth of this and of future generations will imbibe from these writings no scurrility, no infidelity, no moral impurity, no irreverence towards the Creator and the Sacred Scriptures. Most of them are not, indeed, strictly speaking, religious writings; they are not on strictly religious subjects, but they abound in just sentiments concerning duty, and exhibit a profound veneration for the Ruler of all.

One passage on the power of conscience is terrific. It may be found in the opening paragraphs of the Knapp case. It begins with the words, "He has done the *murder*. No eye has seen him nor ear has heard him. The *secret* is his own, and it is safe. Ah, gentlemen, that was a dreadful mistake. Such a secret can be safe nowhere. The whole creation of God has neither nook nor corner where the guilty can bestow it, and say that it is safe." The passage is too long for quotation at this moment. But as showing the horrors of conscience, there is nothing in Macbeth superior to it. I know nothing in the language of men surpassing it. The

closing paragraph of that tremendous plea is less terrible, but hardly less sublime. Urging the jury to bring in a verdict according to their sense of duty, he says, "With consciences satisfied with the discharge of duty, no consequences can harm you. There is no evil that we cannot either face or fly from, but the consciousness of duty disregarded.

"A sense of duty pursues us ever. It is omnipresent, like the Deity. If we take to ourselves the wings of the morning, and dwell in the utmost part of the seas, duty performed or duty violated is still with us, for our happiness or our misery. If we say the darkness shall cover us, in the darkness as in the light our obligations are yet with us. We cannot escape their power nor fly from their presence. They are with us in this life, will be with us at its close; and in that scene of inconceivable solemnity which is yet farther onward, we shall find ourselves surrounded by the consciousness of duty, to pain us wherever it has been violated, and to console us so far as God may have given us grace to perform it."

Similar thoughts may be found, though for the most part briefly expressed, in almost all the works of Webster. His profound regard for the Sacred Scriptures was often manifested. On one occasion he had an opportunity in the way of professional duty, to express his sentiments on the Christian religion and its institutions at considerable length. Most sacredly was that opportunity improved. Stephen Girard, a man of vast wealth, had bequeathed a great sum of money to the city of Philadelphia, in trust, for the establishment of an Orphan College, from

which special instruction in Christianity, and the ministers of religion of all denominations should be excluded. Mr. Webster appeared as counsel, before the Supreme Court of the United States, in opposition to the will, on the ground that *such* a bequest is no *charity*, and therefore cannot legally be held as such. The plea is really a plea for the Christian ministry and the religious education of the young. In it he brings powerfully to view the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, responsibility in another world for our conduct in this, the divine authority of the New Testament, of which, says he, referring to the words of Dr. Paley, “a single word from the New Testament shuts up the mouth of human questioning, and excludes all human reasoning.” “In no case,” he says, “according to the law of England, a man that has no belief in future rewards and punishments, for virtues or vices, is allowed to be a witness, *nor ought he to be.*” He quotes with approbation the words of John Foster, in which he insists that the minds of children ought early to “be taken possession of by just and solemn ideas of their relation to the eternal Almighty Being; that they may be taught to apprehend it as an awful reality; that they are perpetually under His inspection; and as a certainty that they must at length appear before Him in judgment, and find in another life the consequences of what they are in spirit and conduct here.”

I shall present one or two passages more, though of considerable length, not only as showing the man, but for the sentiments which they contain.

“My learned friend has referred with propriety to one

of the commandments of the Decalogue; but there is another, a first commandment, and that is a precept of religion, and it is in subordination to this, that the moral precepts of the Decalogue are proclaimed. This first great commandment teaches men that there is one and only one great first Cause — one and only one proper object of human worship. This is the great, the ever fresh, the overflowing fountain of all revealed truth. Without it human life is a desert, of no known termination on any side, but shut in on all sides by a dark and impenetrable horizon. Without the light of this truth, man knows nothing of his origin and nothing of his end. And when the Decalogue was delivered to the Jews, with this great announcement and command at its head, what said the inspired lawgiver? — that it should be kept from children?” Mr. Girard would have no religious instruction given to a child till he was eighteen years of age — till, indeed, he had left the walls of the Girard College. “That it should be reserved as a communication fit only for mature age? Far, far otherwise. ‘And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down and when thou risest up.’

“There is an authority still more imposing and awful. When little children were brought into the presence of the Son of God, his disciples proposed to send them away! but he said ‘Suffer little children to come unto me’ — unto *me*; he did not send them first for les-

sons in morals to the schools of the Pharisees or to the unbelieving Sadducees, nor to read the precepts and lessons *phyllacteried* on the garments of the Jewish priesthood; he said nothing of different creeds or clashing doctrines; but he opened at once to the youthful mind the everlasting fountains of living waters, the only source of immortal truths; ‘Suffer little children to come *unto me*.’ And that injunction is of perpetual obligation. It addresses itself to-day with the same earnestness and the same authority which attended its first utterance to the Christian world. It is of force everywhere and at all times. It extends to the ends of the earth, it will reach to the end of time, always and everywhere sounding in the ears of men, with an emphasis which no repetition can weaken, and with an authority which nothing can supercede — ‘Suffer little children to come unto me.’

“And not only my heart, and my judgment, my belief and my conscience instruct me, that this great precept should be obeyed, but the idea is so sacred, the solemn thoughts connected with it so crowd upon me, it is so utterly at variance with this system of philosophical *moral-ity* which we have heard advocated, that I stand and speak here in fear of being influenced by my feelings to exceed the proper line of my professional duty.”

I ought to quote the whole of this admirable argument, to do it justice. It was a case whose decision Mr. Webster felt, to use his own language again, “is to influence the happiness, the temporal and the eternal welfare, of one hundred millions of human beings, alive and to be born in this land.” But I will select only one pas-

sage more. In it, he expresses his extreme disgust for this idea of withholding religious instruction from children till they are eighteen years of age. "Why sir, it is vain to talk about the destructive tendency of such a system; to argue upon it is to insult the understanding of every man; it is *mere, sheer, low, ribald, vulgar deism and infidelity*. It opposes all that is in Heaven, and all on earth that is worth being on earth. It destroys the connecting link between the creature and the Creator; it opposes that great system of universal benevolence and goodness that binds man to his Maker. *No religion till he is eighteen!* What would be the condition of all your families — of all your children — if religious fathers and religious mothers were to teach their sons and daughters no religious tenets till they were eighteen? What would become of their morals, their excellence, their purity of heart and life, their hope for time and eternity? What would become of all those thousand ties of sweetness, benevolence, love and Christian feeling that now render our young men and young maidens, like comely plants growing up by a streamlet's side — the graces and the grace of opening manhood — of blossoming womanhood? What would become of all that now renders the social circle lovely and beloved? What would become of society itself? How could it exist?"

Pardon this length of quotation. I wished to show you the man whose writings are to be the study and admiration of our youth in coming times, and the spirit which was at the foundation of those writings, and which often breathes its fragrance through the driest argu-

ments and most abstract subjects. How different the influence of such works, from that of some who stand high on the scroll of our nation's history! I will not *name* them. Let their words and works and memories, so far as they are unhallowed, perish together.

I pass to consider Mr. Webster's more direct services to the country. I wish to contemplate them *religiously*, and their author, as raised up by the God of our fathers to perform them.

God, my hearers, is the author and arbiter of nations. By Him each people, as an organized many-membered whole, has its design. I approach this fact with sensibility and awe. I seem to see the Omnipotent on His throne, and the ages rolling by at His feet. He founds and brings forward each dynasty, kingdom and power, in its turn. Communities dash against each other, and all is confusion and bloodshed below, but order and beneficence reigns above. In all the workings and counterworkings and oppositions of states and nations, in the onrushing of millions, in their defeat and retrograde, the Almighty is working out His own results. If this is taught by reason, thus do the Scriptures certainly represent the matter. Not only was the chosen people organized and miraculously sustained for a divine purpose, but the same is true of all the kingdoms of the ancient world. God puts himself at the head of them, makes them the subjects of prophetic announcement, brings them on and conducts them off the stage at pleasure. The Syrian, the Babylonian, the Median, the Persian,

the Grecian and the Roman powers are especially designated as rising and going down according to his pre-arrangements. They act their several parts in history, and then give place to their successors, preparing the way for that Heaven-descended Kingdom which is to cover the whole earth.

In working out these results, God also raises up men for the times. He raised up that Pharaoh in Egypt whose name is mentioned only with dishonor. Among the Persians, He raised up Cyrus; among the Greeks, Pericles and Demosthenes; among the Romans, Cicero. For our Saxon fathers, He raised up Alfred. To England, in modern times, He gave Milton and Cromwell. To the old Hebrew Commonwealth, Moses. To the Middle Ages, Charlemagne. For us, in the times of extremity, He brought forward Washington. From His hands, we have received, in our own day, great Webster. Three special times he saved the country, and three special times he was himself almost miraculously preserved for its salvation.

Looking back on the past we see everywhere God in history. In every political organization and revolution, He had His purposes. By us, He would seem to present an example before the world of a great, intelligent, self-governing people. Among us, He would bring man to his true manhood, and by the power of knowledge and religion, universally diffused, and by the benign effects of a free, constitutional government, prepare the way for a fraternity of nations and individuals, to be all one in God. In aiding this object, He

raised up, I doubt not, that great light whose sudden eclipse we now lament. It was his special mission to sustain the Constitution of his country, defend the Union from rupture, preserve the nation from domestic and foreign war, promote the spread and prosperity of the people, and by his justice, magnanimity and intellect honor free institutions in the view of mankind.

Some people look upon government as a matter entirely apart from religion. But to one who enters on its duties with right feelings, I know of no work more sacred. The preaching of the Gospel is indispensable; nothing, on the whole, is of so much importance; but the statesman who acts in the fear of God has sometimes power to do that for the advancement of society, in a few years, which, as a private minister of religion he could hardly have accomplished in centuries. I am not accustomed, therefore, to look on the government of nations as a mere worldly employment. Nothing, if engaged in with right views, can be more sacred. Somewhat in this light, the subject seems to have been regarded by our deceased statesman. Next to the sacredness of inspiration, I am told by one who knew his private, as well as his public life, "he approached no written thing with such awe as the Constitution; and never spoke on the great themes which affect the government and the nation, except with solemnity." In this light of conscientiousness, of patriotism, of sacredness, I am accustomed to contemplate his leading acts. Allow that he made mistakes, dissent as strongly as you will from

his opinions, provided you dissent intelligently and honestly, you will not deny that God raised him up as a benefactor to our nation.

I cannot enumerate Mr. Webster's services to the country. They extend over a period of nearly fifty years. But when the doctrine was broached that any State had a constitutional right, for reasons which it might deem sufficient, to withdraw from the confederacy, and when this political heresy had been promulgated with great passion and power of plausible argument and considerable success, it was Webster's intellect which broke the hostile forces. He expounded and defended the Constitution, enlightened the country, and secured its verdict in favor of inseparable Union, and saved us from a train of disasters which might have lasted for centuries. When, in 1842, we were on the verge of a war with England, when difficulties of long standing and complicated character had defied the diplomacy of successive administrations, and now seemed insurmountable — when irritation, recrimination and mutual menace and the raising of armies betokened what was coming, and blood had actually begun to flow, it was Webster's statesmanship which brought order out of confusion, allayed the passions of opposing nations, and gave the country an honorable peace. When, again, on the accession of Mr. Polk to the Presidency, the Oregon question took a turn which seemed to render war with England, a second time, inevitable, it was a letter of Mr. Webster, then in private life, addressed to Mr. McGregor, of Glasgow, and by him communicated to Lord John Russell and Lord Aberdeen,

which induced Her Majesty's Government to make those proposals for settlement, which constitute the Oregon treaty, and which enabled the London Examiner to say, that Mr. McGregor had "preserved the peace of the world." Again, when, in consequence of a vast accession of new territory, which accession Mr. Webster, foreseeing the fearful agitations that must follow, had earnestly opposed, the pillars of our Union were shaken, and violent outbreaks and a fratricidal war were at hand, it was Mr. Webster, more than any other man, who secured the passage of measures which saved the country.

I am well aware that different views are taken of the propriety of his course, in reference to what are called the compromise measures. Some have looked upon him from that moment as "little less than archangel fallen." I have been pained to read in a religious newspaper such sentiments as these. "The Mr. Webster whom the nation mourns is the Mr. Webster of history. Let us say that the last of young America's great triumvirate died before the ides or rather the calends of March, 1850. For what award of sober history in coming time will not say that on the seventh of that month, the great statesman, who had stood in the Senate and the forum as the champion of liberty, truth, and principle, never bending to expediency, never yielding to motives of selfishness, never distrusting the authority or the triumphant power of right, was no more?"

If it be true that the Ethiopian can no more change his skin, or the leopard his spots, than they who are accustomed to do evil can learn to do well, is it probable that “a champion of liberty, truth and principle, never bending to expediency, never yielding to motives of selfishness, never distrusting the authority or the triumphant power of right,” till he is almost three score years and ten, should be suddenly converted, by a backward process, into something worse than we are willing to name? We may have our opinions of the expediency and of the justice of those measures. But that Mr. Webster intended to do the very best thing which, under all the circumstances, *he* could do, few that know his characteristic honesty will doubt. The public men most profoundly acquainted with the critical state of our affairs at the time render the most emphatic testimony to the wisdom and patriotism of his conduct on that occasion. A vast majority of the citizens of the United States have adopted his view as moderate, conciliatory, and constitutional. The highest courts have stamped it with the seal of their judicial sanction. At all events, when his course has been approved by such men of piety and patriotism as the late Professor Stuart, of Andover, and a thousand others of the highest principle and intelligence,—men not in political life and not to be suspected of selfish motives,—a little charity in commenting on his acts might be pardonable.

If Mr. Webster had any idol, that idol was his country. He loved it with the whole strength of his heart. He saw in the Union a blessing to mankind. He saw

in its rupture disgrace and misery at home, and the eclipse of rising nations abroad. It was his oft-repeated prayer, "that when his eyes should be turned for the last time to behold the sun in heaven, he might not see him shining on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union; on States dissevered, discordant, belligerent; on a land rent with civil feuds or drenched it may be in fraternal blood." He was willing to make any sacrifices, personal or sectional, which he thought the public safety required.

In this last assertion you see the motives of his conduct. And I thank God, my brethren, for raising up such a man. His deeds and words live after him, and their influence will be felt for centuries. His pleadings for the Union which have been sounding in the ears of twenty millions of people, especially since 1849, and who are the representatives of one hundred millions soon to inhabit this soil, will strongly bear up the dome of our Union, and prevent it from falling in awful fragments on our heads.

Some may think less of this service than I do. Some may even delude themselves with the opinion that there is no danger of a rupture, and others may imagine it a tolerable evil should it come. But I look upon the idea of disunion, my brethren, with horror. When I think of such an event as possible, I seem to see the spectral hand holding forth its prophetic roll. As it opens before me, it "is written upon within and without, and there is written therein lamentations and mourning and woe."

The dissolution of this Union,—I know not another probable catastrophe so dreadful. We have read of the evils which preceded its formation and made it necessary: disordered finances, business in confusion, confidence destroyed, estates ruined; the contempt of foreign powers; jealousies among ourselves which imperiled the country. We have witnessed the prosperity which followed. Never since our earth emerged from chaos has the sun looked down on such rapid advancement. Within little more than half a century, the nation has risen to a height of glory beyond what was reached, taking all things into consideration, by Rome or France or England, after ages of growth. Nothing seems to hinder the United States, if true to themselves, from soon standing at the head of the nations. I mean the head not merely in territory and wealth, but in moral influence, and in everything which constitutes the elevation and happiness of a community. But let the blind Sampson of disunion, grasping the pillars of our Constitution, bow itself in the midst and bring our political fabric to the ground, and there

“Will be a voice of weeping, which shall drown
The roar of waters in the cry of blood.”

What should we gain? Nothing, positively nothing. There is no probability of our gaining anything to any true interest in the land. The colored race, it seems to me, would gain no more than the white. The area of slavery would be increased rather than diminished by the process. And where would be our national influence among the powers of the earth? Our commerce would lose its protection, our

finances would be thrown into disorder, our enterprise would be crippled, education and religion arrested; the conversion of the world put back, I have no doubt, a hundred, if not five hundred years. Abroad, it would no longer avail us to say, as we now do proudly, "I am an American citizen." At home, our States would dash against each other in confusion. We should attempt new Unions—but in vain. We should confederate and be broken, and confederate and be broken. Border wars would be interminable. Blood would never cease to flow. In the fearful language of Scripture, "we should be cast into the wine-press of the wrath of God, and the blood would come out of the wine-press unto the horses' bridles."

Tell me not that the many kingdoms of Europe live side by side, in independent sovereignties, and maintain a balance of power between themselves. Has not their present measure of security cost them centuries of anarchy and millions of lives, and standing armies, and a burthen of debt that crushes the people into remediless poverty? The kingdoms of Europe maintain a balance of power among themselves! Yes, and every moment the balance wavers!—A breath turns it—and what then?

The idea of living peacefully, under such circumstances, is preposterous! He talks like a boy, who says there would be no *need* of civil strifes among us. *Could* our thirty stars move harmoniously in their appropriate orbits, when the great central principle of gravitation had been destroyed? No, there would be a storm in our heavens, and a shipwreck of the stars.

This is not all. The hopes of the people throughout the civilized world, are directed towards this country. It is the grand depository of free thoughts, free principles, free institutions. The overthrow of this government would be the triumph of despots, and the destruction of the hopes of millions.

I know that there are evils connected with our compact which every friend of humanity must deplore. Time and forbearance and wise legislation and the progress of the Gospel and the Providence of God, answering prayer, I trust will remove them. But the knife of amputation rashly used will destroy the body politic, from which they are at present inseparable.

No one of our statesmen has seen the dangers of the country and the consequences, if those dangers were not averted, with such penetration as Mr. Webster. He had been for half a century in the councils of the nation. He had been particularly consulted, on great national questions, and his help had been invoked by nearly if not quite every administration, whether Whig or Democratic, since Munroe's. He had come to feel not only a great love for the country, but a measure of responsibility felt by no man since Washington. He could not think of a possible break up amongst us except with the deepest emotion. He gave the whole of his vast energies to the work of seeing that the Republic received no detriment. If ever a man was sincere on any subject connected with the government, I believe Mr. Webster to be sincere in this. "I own I have a part to act," said he, in his 7th of March speech,

“not for my own security or safety. I am looking out for no fragment on which to float away from the wreck, if wreck there must be, but for the good of the whole and the preservation of the whole; and there is that which will keep me to my duty during the struggle, whether the sun and the stars shall appear or not appear for many days. I speak for the preservation of the Union.” He spoke; and being dead yet speaketh—and his words will bind our States together, I hope, till the heavens are no more.

It has been objected to Mr. Webster, that he was conscious of his greatness. But how can a man be truly great, and not be conscious of it? Was he not great? Not to know the actual facts of one's own character implies weakness. Nor is there much more virtue in thinking one's self small if he is really great, than in thinking one's self great when he has but insignificant abilities. The same Scripture which tells us not to think too highly of ourselves, tells us to think soberly and as we ought to think. If Mr. Webster thought of himself soberly and as he ought to think, he could not imagine that he had but a single talent for which to give account.

But they say that he was not only conscious of greatness, but seemed to demand acknowledgment of it. If this charge carries an idea of personal vanity, I know not a distinguished individual in history more free from it. His bearing was noble, it was sublime, but there was no self-complacency, much less vanity in it. If the charge implies only a desire to be estimated

according to worth, in other words, to be appreciated, such a trait of character is to be commended, not censured. I see it in that pattern of modesty, our great EXEMPLAR. There is no merit in running one's self down, or in declining to take those positions in society for which God has designed us. On the contrary, can a good man, conscious of ability to be extensively useful, allow his talents to be buried, and feel satisfied? His truthful nature not only requires him to be useful according to his powers, but craves to be estimated according to its value.

Again, it is said that Mr. Webster was ambitious. That he desired, for some reasons, the highest position of influence, I will not deny. Different men will estimate this desire differently. Some will be influenced in their judgment of it by the predilections of party, some by envious rivalry, and some by what they see in it through the mirror of their own selfishness. There are persons who have no idea of a possible disinterestedness in such circumstances. But is the desire of supremacy necessarily vulgar ambition? Why does a father choose to be at the head of his own family? Is it because he is ambitious? And why, let me ask, with reverence, does the Creator take the highest place in the universe? Is there anything in Him which has affinity to ambition? Why should not a good man, conscious of ability to perform great services for his country, desire the opportunity? Suppose an individual remarkably qualified to fill the highest office in the land; suppose him to be fully aware of his peculiar fitness for this trust; suppose him to love his country, its reputation, its prosperity,

its happiness, with all his heart; suppose that he sees dangers threatening the nation, and trembles lest rash hands and unwise counsels destroy it,—should such a man desire to hold the helm of government, must he be set down as ambitious? I profess not to judge the heart. But while I can imagine so good a motive for aspiring to the headship of the nation, I cannot and I will not attribute the desire of such a patriot and of such a man to mere vulgar ambition.

Mr. Webster was pre-eminently a national statesman. He had never been a member of any State legislature, except for a small part of a single term. Strongly attached to the principles and measures of the North, a Whig in spirit and political affinities, his mind towered above sectional circumstances and party influences. While he sacredly protected the rights of the States, he saw the glory of the country in the Union. As a national man, he won the honor of being the expounder and defender of the Constitution. He uniformly and religiously sustained all its guaranties and compromises. To the North he was the champion of freedom; in his conduct towards the South he was the embodiment of justice. Though connected with a party, no man has shown himself more independent of party. Without swerving the breadth of a hair from his integrity and his “recorded opinions,” we find him putting forth the strength of his greatness, when the country’s good demanded it, in sustaining the leading measures of an opposing administration. On another occasion, he maintains his position as Secretary of State, at the hazard of his popularity, and with the loss of many friends, that

he might accomplish, at whatever sacrifice to himself, a great work for the nation. Since that time, even more than before, no man that ever lived on our soil has ever pleaded for the whole nation with such fervor as he. Not a national statesman? Who but a national statesman, proud of his great, free country, could ever have written the Hålsesmann letter? Where is there in our entire history a distinguished man who grasped the whole Union in his affections with more strength and tenacity? Were we called upon to present to mankind a representative of our national institutions, a personal embodiment of the great ideas of the United States, I know not whom we could select for this end, if not Daniel Webster.

Mr. Webster, as might be expected where the press is free and party spirit runs high, has been the object of much calumny. I will not excite your indignation by repeating so much as one of the infamous ribaldries which unprincipled news-mongers have circulated concerning him. Never has a public man in this country been so calumniated, and never, in respect at least to his public life,—high-minded enemies being judges,—with so little reason. Mr. Calhoun, for many years a political opponent, bore testimony before his death to Mr. Webster's integrity and honor as a politician and a patriot. That same gentleman, however, allowed himself, many years ago, in the excitement of debate, to insinuate that something might be said derogatory to the patriotism of his antagonist, "*if time had allowed.*" Mr. Webster indignantly repelled the libel, and challenged the distinguished Carolinian to search his whole

life through, and find aught if he could which deserved this accusation. He then added, "Sir, I am glad this subject has been alluded to in a manner which justifies me in taking public notice of it; because I am well aware that for ten years past, infinite pains has been taken to find something, in the range of these topics, which might create prejudice against me in the country. The journals have all been pored over, and the reports ransacked, and scraps of paragraphs and half sentences have been collected, fraudulently put together, and then made to flare out as if there had been some discovery. But all this failed. The next resort was to supposed correspondence. My letters were sought for to learn if, in the confidence of private friendship, I had ever said anything which an enemy could make use of. With this view the vicinity of my former residence has been searched as with a lighted candle. New Hampshire has been explored from the mouth of the Merrimack to the White Hills. In one instance a gentleman had left the State, gone five hundred miles off, and died. His papers were examined; a letter was found, and I have understood it was brought to Washington and examined; a conclave was held to consider it, and the result was, that if there was nothing else against Mr. Webster, the matter had better be let alone. Sir, I hope to make everybody of that opinion who brings against me a charge of want of patriotism. Errors of opinion can be found, doubtless, on many subjects; but as conduct flows from the feelings which animate the heart, I know that no act of my life has had its origin in the want of ardent love of country." This was in 1838; what would the

old statesman have said, if he had poured out his heart on the subject of detraction, at the close of his days in 1852?

The sanctuary of his private life has been invaded, and foul masses of slander heaped upon him. And for what cause? It was not done by way of retaliation, railing for railing. Mr. Webster treated his opponents with justice and urbanity. I doubt if another instance can be found of a man in public life for fifty years, so free from the sin of recrimination, unjust insinuation, and anything approaching towards dishonorable personality. What then was the cause of all this abuse? Allow that the great statesman had his faults. Were they more glaring than are found in many public men whom the million applaud? Faults there may have been, but why were they so monstrously exaggerated? Why were legions of calumnies fabricated? The cause of this abuse lies deeper than the frailties of its victim. The cause, as I conceive it, was pre-eminent greatness, which stood in conspicuous view to receive the shafts of envy. The cause was a stern integrity, which the office-seeking and the self-seeking could not bend, a principle of patriotism and justice, which the unscrupulous could no more break down than they could overthrow the everlasting granite pillars among which he was born. The cause was a certain awful majesty of character, before which petty politicians, who loved self rather than country, cowered. The cause was a power of intellect and a power of influence which demagogues and partisans knew they could conflict with only by revilings. These were so industriously

circulated, that the unsuspecting said there must be a foundation for them; and in some instances men repeated their own falsehood till they believed their own lie. These are causes of calumny to which public men everywhere, and especially in this country, are increasingly exposed.

The crime of slander cannot easily be estimated. It originates in a certain meanness of spirit, or in an unmanly love of gossiping, or in that calculating rascality which destroys character for selfish ends. In its influence upon the calumniator himself, scarcely any sin is more demoralizing. It petrifies benevolent sensibility; it stimulates those vicious feelings which, when fully developed, make men haters of their kind. It is the cause of incalculable suffering to its victim; it takes away that which a high-minded man values more than property, and without which life is a burden. To the more susceptible, its shafts are not unfrequently the arrows of death; and the strong writhe under them with pangs to which bodily pains are in comparison a relief. Hopes are blasted by slander. The energies of men acting for the public good are often crippled by it, and their days made wretched. Public detraction is the great sin of the times. The country is full of it; men get their dishonest living by it; it comes to the innocent in a shape which cannot be met by testimony or argument, and put down; it comes without a responsible name; it puts its victim to the often impossible task of proving a negative; it lurks in the dark — it multiplies itself into legions; it is here, it is there; it hides when you approach, and appears again as soon as you

are gone. And there is no hope for the man on whom it falls but in his conscience, and in living it down. It is a sin which has no excuse. Worse than sins of the flesh, for it comes from the centre of a man's being; worse than the offence which it alleges, because it has no strong temptation, — I look upon it as infernal. The eagerness with which some gather up “stale and loathed calumnies,” — “the cast off slough of a polluted and shameless press,” — suggests the idea that, like certain ill-omened birds, it is their *nature* to feed on *carion*.

With regard to Mr. Webster, I have no means of deciding upon the character of his entire private life. I had a little acquaintance with him, though not enough for self-complacency. I know something of the high reputation which he sustained at home. But to what extent he partook of human frailties, I am not the judge. The customs of society have greatly changed, in some respects, since his habits were formed, and he has usually moved in circles where a puritanical strictness is not always regarded as the prince of virtues. But when I remember that “publications more abusive and scurrilous never saw the light, than were sent forth against Washington,” and when I remember that One greater than Washington was charged with being “a gluttonous man and a winebibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners,” I am not inclined to believe an evil report just because “Gashmu saith it.” Nor do I think that a man who has faults is always radically a bad man. There are those who can see nothing in Abraham but his prevarication, nothing in David but the crime

against Uriah, and nothing in Peter but his denial of Christ. And there are those, to use again the words of Mr. Webster, "who think that nothing is good but what is perfect. If their perspicacious vision enables them to detect a spot on the face of the sun, they think that a good reason why the sun should be struck down from heaven."* There are such persons; but, as a man encompassed with infirmities, I do not wish to be of their number. Read the eighth chapter of John, and you will learn that the severest accusers are not always the purest in heart. I hold him forth for imitation only so far as he resembled that great PATTERN, whom he himself so much admired and adored.

Mr. Webster's private habits, I have said, I have no means of knowing in all respects. But his custom of early rising and hard morning toil—his clear, strong utterances of truth, always clear and always strong—his uniform observance of all the rules of order in the Senate chamber—his entire freedom from those personal broils and bickerings which sometimes disgrace the halls of legislation—his fine moral sentiments, indicating sensitiveness of conscience—his tender domestic affections—his love of the Sacred Scriptures, which he read through once a year, and which he declared to be the Book of Books, fitting us to live and fitting us to die—his profound veneration of God—his respect for the Sabbath—his habit of family devotion—his constant attendance upon public worship—his early profession of faith in Christ, and the custom of Communion at the Lord's table—his tender

* 7th March speech.

love for little children, and the interest which he has expressed in their religious education—his uniform propriety of speech, insomuch that a gentleman said to me at the funeral, “I have been with him under all circumstances; I have been with him at great parties and at little parties; I have been often a fishing with him, and all over the farm, and I never heard him utter a profane word or an impure word in my life” — the foresight and calmness with which he prepared his own tomb in the old puritan burying ground overlooking the sea — his unabated intellectual strength, when three score years and ten — his parting words of affection and religious counsel to his friends — his last prayers — is all this like — I will not say what. It is like goodness of heart; it is like religion; it is like himself who once said, “I would give all this world to be sure of standing, on the right hand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

Mr. Webster, I suppose, joined the Orthodox Congregational Church in Salisbury, New Hampshire, at an early age, and died, I have no reason to doubt, in the faith of his fathers. He was not, however, a sectarian; “Depend upon it,” said he, “that where there is a spirit of Christianity, there is a spirit which rises above form, above ceremonies, independent of sect or creed, and the controversies of clashing doctrines.”* He grasped the substance, not the shadow. So does every good man, however great his preference for a particular church.

I once happened, in the common course of official

* Girard Case, p. 37.

duty, to preach before him. I remember his dignified attention and devout demeanor. I never shall forget the expression of interest with which he fixed his eyes upon me, as I quoted these words of that high-minded man, Sir Thomas More: "I judge it ten times more honorable for a single person, in witnessing a truth, to oppose the world in its power, wisdom and authority, this standing in its full strength, and he singly and nakedly, than by fighting many battles by force of arms and gaining them all. I have no life but truth; and if truth be advanced by my suffering, then my life also. If truth live, I live; if justice live, I live; and these cannot die; but, by any man's suffering for them, are enlarged, enthroned." To these words his whole life seems to say, Amen.

I have detained you too long, but I must be pardoned. A wonderful man has just gone from us. The country has indeed been prolific of great men. Free institutions cherish them. But God has never raised up among us but one George Washington and one Daniel Webster. In common with thousands, I loved him; and if he had faults, "with all his faults, I loved him still." I honored him; he had qualities of mind and heart which drew me like a magnet. The driest newspaper was full of interest, if it only contained a few words from Mr. Webster; and when any spoke unkindly of him, I felt it as a personal wound.

Is there a person here who would not heartily unite with me, if I should now pause and render public thanks to Almighty God for the creation of such a man? Are there not many who look back upon the hours and

days which they have spent in hearing or reading his words of power, as among the happiest portions of their life? The idea of his great presence elevated them, and his good deeds for the country called forth their prayers in his behalf. To me, I confess, the world has often seemed as a more desirable scene of being, from the existence of that one mind in it, and there was always a melody in my heart, when I read a new speech from him, like that which is ever breathing in the scholar's ear, from the best pages of classic antiquity. I thank God, not only for what that man has done in behalf of our country, not only for any intellectual improvement I may have derived from him, but for the *happiness* which his life has afforded me.

Mr. Webster is dead. That great mind which often pondered the problems of immortality now knows all. What visions has it beheld! What ideas has it obtained of that Omnipotent God whom it had often so profoundly worshipped!

Solemn reflections crowd upon us. The great as well as the small must die. The great as well as the small, after death, must stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Of the great as well as the small, God, not man, will be the judge. For the great as well as the small the rule of judgment will be the same. That rule was stated in the last words of our Saviour, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." How affecting to hear our dying statesman exclaim, as his confession of Christ, before the country and before mankind, "Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief." It is good for us to see such a man

humbling himself as a little child, that he may enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

He is dead! Three score years and ten, with a life of incessant toil for the public, had shaken his frame. But I have no doubt that his death was hastened by supposed ingratitude,—

“Ingratitude, more strong than traitor’s arms,
Quite vanquished him. Then burst his mighty heart.”

His heart was broken. Not that he died of disappointed ambition. Such a man as Webster die because he could not reach the Presidency?—the supposition is too childish. He feared the consequences, should the government pass into hands unfriendly to his recent measures for the Union. But this was not it. He had spent a long life for the American people, and when at last in his old age, it was put to them, “Are you satisfied?” the American people said “No!” Then broke that mighty heart. From that moment, it began to beat tumultuous marches for the grave. No! it was not the American people who said it. It was the doctrine of availability. It was the admiration of military glory. He wore no bloody laurels on his brow. It was the vaulting ambition of self-seeking politicians. This the patriot knew. “A false chapter,” said he, “has been written in the history of the country;” “The masses,” said he, “are with us.” But the masses are not usually the speakers. To the question, “Are you satisfied?” the spokesmen of the people had said “No!” And it went echoing through the country and all over the world, “No!”—He retired to Marshfield;—he went out and looked at his tomb.

No doubt the people loved him. On his way from Washington for the last time, as he approached the neighborhood of his puritan home, he had an opportunity to see it. They came out from Marshfield and Kingston and Duxbury, and all the region about, to give him a welcome. The young threw him flowers, the old gave him tears, the yeomanry stood round him and followed him. It was the homage of his neighbors — that touched him. When they came near the old mansion, the cavalcade stopped. “Are you not going down to the house?” said Mr. Webster. “No,” said one, “we thought we would go around, and not tear up your grounds.” “Tear up the grounds,” said Mr. Webster, “I don’t care if you tear them up ten feet deep — you must go to the house.” That was like him; always so hearty. On that day, he made his last speech. The next time his neighbors met him was at his funeral. Were not the masses with him? That funeral day told the story. And from that time to this, it has been nothing but a funeral day all over the country, and the mourning is as the mourning of Hadadrimmon.

Rest, great sleeper, rest! The Pilgrims in their dusty beds make room for thee. The spirits of patriots bid thee welcome. There is no rejection in the grave; there is no ingratitude in Heaven. O, my country, thou hast lost a father! Write his counsels on thy heart. Thou hast had a Washington, thou hast had a Webster! God raise up some other such, and we will confess even in their lifetime, that there are prophets among us.



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